	ED STATES DISTRICT COURT	
	HERN DISTRICT OF NEW YORK	
	E TETHER AND BITFINEX TO ASSET LITIGATION	
	x	19 Civ. 9236 (KPE
	x	New York, N.Y. October 31, 2023 3:45 p.m.
Befo:	re:	
	HON. KATHERINE	POLK FATLLA.
		District Judge
	* 00	-
	APPEARA	ANCED
SELE	NDY GAY ELSBERG PLLC Attorneys for David Leibowit	tz
BY:	ANDREW R. DUNLAP LAURA M. KING	
	OSCAR SHINE -and-	
	EIDER WALLACE COTTRELL KONECH SUNNY S. SARKIS	KY LLP
DEBEVOISE & PLIMPTON LLP		
BY:	Attorneys for iFinex Inc. ELLIOT GREENFIELD	
	NATASCHA BORN	
WILLKIE FARR & GALLAGHER LLP Attorneys for Philip G. Pot		tar
BY:	ANDREW N. SHINDI	

(Case called; appearances noted)

THE COURT: Thank you.

Let me begin by thanking all of you for your patience. Just in case you were wondering what's been occupying my time these past couple of days, I have a Hague Convention parental kidnapping hearing. That's what you walked in on where my petitioner is in Poland and, for various reasons, cannot enter this country, and as a result, we have very difficult virtual hearings in part. So I appreciate your patience through all of those.

This is, in theory, our post fact discovery conference. I have read a number of things in connection with this, including the joint status update of October 27th. What you might understand is sort of operating beneath the surface and making me think is, what to do with this request for leave to file a second amended complaint. When I saw it, I knew Mr. Greenfield enough — and I say this with all the respect I have for him — to know that he'd object and he wasn't going to consent and let this happen. That led me to wonder why we're doing this. I thought before I had actually really read the proposed amended complaint or the prior two, that this was really designed to ease the parties when it came to the class certification motion. But in looking at the red line, it looked to me as though it was a much more, a much different, a much more substantively altered amended complaint.

And so, I'm trying to figure out, and I mean this very sincerely, because if I had my decision already made, I wouldn't be asking these questions, but I guess I really do want to understand why we need to file this amendment. Why, for example, we couldn't proceed to the certification motion on the pleading as it now exists or to summary judgment on the pleading with the record we now have, and what is really gained with the amendment. And then I'll hear, with greater specificity than one paragraph in a joint letter, why the defendants do not agree.

So perhaps, Mr. Dunlap, I'll begin with you.

MR. DUNLAP: Yes. Thank you, your Honor.

So, to be clear, we believe that the revised claims that we're putting forward in the proposed amended complaint fall within the claims that we pled in the current operative complaint. They allege a debasement of USDT, they involve a funneling of that USDT to two crypto accounts on Bittrex and Poloniex exchanges, the trading of that USDT for crypto commodities, and a resulting inflation of crypto commodity prices, especially Bitcoin prices.

What we attempted do in the amended complaint is lay out the particulars we learned in discovery of how the USDT was debased, how the USDT was funneled to those two accounts, and then put an expert analysis for how the inflation occurred. We believe that we could proceed to class certification within the

current pleadings because our current operative theory is a subset of what we're putting forward.

We thought it made sense to come now to move to conform the pleadings to the evidence that's in discovery so that we could streamline the case. There are certain parties that we want to drop, there are certain claims that we want to drop, there's a more modest class period that we want to pursue, and we wanted to give you and the other side as much notice as possible of where we see the state of the pleadings following discovery, so we moved to amend as promptly as we could following the close of discovery so that we could make sure that everything learned in discovery was on the table now.

We're happy to proceed however you would like. We thought this would actually be a benefit to the Court and to the other side.

THE COURT: Sir, if we were proceeding to summary judgment rather than class certification motion, would you still feel the need to have a proposed amended complaint of this type? I would imagine at that point we would just go to the record and I'd have 56.1 statements that tell me what happened in discovery or what didn't happen in discovery. So I guess I'm asking, I appreciate the extent to which you believe it's going to help me and to help defense counsel, but is the animating principle of the amended complaint the upcoming certification motion or something else?

MR. DUNLAP: It's a couple of things. One is the upcoming certification motion, because we wanted to be absolutely clear where we view the pleadings right now. And when we move for certification on the 20th, we will be moving on the theories that are in our proposed amended complaint, which, as I said, are a subset of what are already in the current operative complaint. But we also, following discovery, now wanted to drop some parties, drop some claims, and streamline the case, and we thought the amended complaint was a good vehicle for doing that.

We also wanted to avoid any confusion that might occur in the class certification briefing about exactly what we're moving on. And as you pointed out, the other side had said in their letter that they have some issues with the new theories, as they call them, that we're putting forward. So we wanted to make sure that was all on the table as far in advance of class certification as possible.

THE COURT: You're actually anticipating my next question, which is this: I appreciate that you believe that the next step in this case is a class certification motion that I fear some poor associates or core of associates have been working on. The issue for me is, I'm understanding from Mr. Greenfield that he wants to basically jump the line on that motion and to file perhaps a motion to dismiss. If he doesn't consent, I don't believe -- I perhaps could grant, over his

objection, but I don't think I'd do it without having more detailed or robust briefing from him in opposition. So I fear where we're headed is a motion for leave to amend that is contested with sort of a cross motion or suggestion that the claims, as you propose to plead them, are futile. I don't see how I can do that with the certification motion, and that's also why I'm asking whether it is still your wish to file an amended complaint.

You said to me, and you were very kind to say to me earlier whatever the Court wants, basically. I want to be sure that I'm hearing from everybody if it is your wish to file the amended complaint, I do think it there has to be motion practice preliminary to that. I do think that would result in us having to adjourn for some period of time the class certification motion and then — I want to breathe deeply as I say this — I'd hear from the parties as to whether I need to adjourn expert discovery while we work out what is the pleading in this case.

None of these things are what I want to do, but that might be what fairness dictate. I'll hear from you on this, then I'll hear from the folks it at the back table.

MR. DUNLAP: Your Honor, I want to make absolutely clear it was not our intent by filing the motion for leave to amend to push out the schedule in any way. That's why I wanted to make clear that we thought we could move for class

certification independent of whatever the Court does on the motion for leave to amend. We think they could proceed in parallel because you could both look at our current motion or our upcoming motion for class certification as a subset of what the current pleadings allow, but then you could also allow, them if they wanted to opposes on futility grounds, the restated claims that we put into the proposed amended complaint.

But we're not trying to slow things down --

THE COURT: I'm not suggesting you are. I just wonder if that's where things are going to shake out.

What I'm saying and what I'm exploring at this point is it wouldn't shock me for someone to say, look, Failla, until we know what the operative pleadings are, we shouldn't do a certification motion, although I do think you might be able to. And then related to that, I would think someone may say — although I'm fine if no one says this — we really should wait on experts until we know what the claims in the case are.

MR. DUNLAP: I can understand that point of view.

One thing I've learned very deeply, I think all the lawyers here in this case, is if delay can be avoided, we should avoid delay.

THE COURT: I'm not disagreeing with that.

MR. DUNLAP: We are open, I think, to whatever arrangement the Court would think best, and I'm sure you want

19

20

21

22

23

24

25

to hear from the other side on this, but --1 2 THE COURT: Your proposal is running the two motions in tandem? 3 4 MR. DUNLAP: Correct. 5 THE COURT: Thank you. Mr. Greenfield, are you speaking for the back table or 6 7 is someone else? MR. GREENFIELD: Yes, I can take the lead here. 8 9 THE COURT: Have I misperceived your argument, sir? 10 MR. GREENFIELD: No, I think you have our arguments 11 generally correct. I think the red line that plaintiff 12 submitted yesterday speaks for itself in large part, this is 13 not a motion to amend to conform to the evidence, this is an 14 entirely new theory. I'm happy to walk through that in some detail if 15 16 you're interested or I can save it for the briefing. 17 THE COURT: You can hum a few bars now, sir. That's 18 okay.

MR. GREENFIELD: I think the best summary of their existing complaint is in your decision on the motion to dismiss. And so, I'll just point you to page 16 of your decision granting in part, denying in part the motion to dismiss where you state the crux of plaintiff's amended complaint is that the DigFinex defendants, now known as the DT defendants, who control Tether and Bitfinex fraudulently issued

between one and three billion dollars worth of crypto asset USDT, which asset defendants claim was backed at all times by an equivalent amount of U.S. dollars reserves, but was in fact completely unbacked and printed out of thin air.

Plaintiffs allege that the unbacked USDT was transferred from Tether to Bitfinex and then further transferred to accounts maintained by Bitfinex on two crypto exchanges operated by the exchange defendants Poloniex and Bittrex.

Once the unbacked USDT was transferred to Poloniex and Bittrex, defendants used it to make carefully timed purchases of crypto commodities when prices threatened to fall, thereby fraudulently given the appearance of price floors in the market, artificially simulating organic demand and creating a colossal bubble in the crypto commodity market and they go on to say that plaintiffs allege that we conspired with the crypto capital defendant and the exchange defendants.

And really, none of that is in their new theory.

There's no more conspiracy with Poloniex, no conspiracy with Bittrex, no conspiracy with Crypto Capital. It's now alleged to be a conspiracy with the anonymous trader. There's no more Bitfinex or Tether owned or controlled accounts at Poloniex or Bittrex. Plaintiffs finally admit that those accounts were owned by the anonymous trader as he told them in a sworn declaration three years ago. There's no more allegation that

USDT was printed out of thin air. There's no allegation anymore that any USDT was traded for Bitcoin or otherwise that had not been purchased for a dollar. So there's no way that there is artificial demand or simulating artificial — artificially simulating organic demand. All of the USDT was purchased for dollars, no allegation otherwise. There's no more carefully timed purchases of crypto commodity. There's no trading by the BT defendants at all. They rely on simply the anonymous traders cross exchange arbitrage.

So it really, in every way, it's a new theory. I think at the highest, not even 30,000-foot level, but looking from outer space, they're alleging there's an issue with USDT reserves, and they're alleging price inflation, but really, everything in between is entirely new. And in my view, and just my view as the defense lawyer here, this new theory is weaker than the existing theory. I think it does not plausibly state a claim.

THE COURT: This is what distresses me, sir, because Mr. Dunlap says to me that it is as though there were — that the theory as originally alleged had multiple components and we are now at a subset. I know you disagree with it, but that is what I was just told, that, as he said, claims of the proposed amended complaint fall within the claims in the — presumably the initial complaint and the post motion to dismiss amended complaint.

I appreciate, under Rule 15 and Rule 16, that you would oppose amendment this late in the day. You've already heard me discuss with Mr. Dunlap whether there are circumstances in which we wouldn't even need to amend the complaint, as for example proceeding to summary judgment.

I think what concerns me though is your -- you oppose, but you would also move to dismiss. So presumably, the way that that would be resolved would be for you responding to the existing motion for leave to file a proposed amended complaint with an opposition that includes a long discussion of futility. That's effectively your motion to dismiss; correct?

MR. GREENFIELD: Yes. And we can -- I was going to raise this with the Court. I think we could do it two different ways. We could have an opposition to their motion to amend that focuses on their lack of good cause for delaying for two years and pointing out 90 percent of the facts in their new theory were available to them two years ago, and the prejudice. And we could separately, if the Court then allows the amendment, have a motion to dismiss.

Alternatively, we can, if it's helpful to the Court, we can put it all in one place, we could put it in our opposition brief. If we're going to do that, then I reluctantly would request a few more pages and a little bit more days. I never like to ask for more pages --

THE COURT: I know, but I appreciate why you believe

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

9

10

11

12

13

14

15

16

17

18

19

20

21

22

23

24

25

you have to, because this is the motion to dismiss that I'm not letting you file.

MR. GREENFIELD: Yes.

THE COURT: You would be doing it through the prism of futility. I think I know the answer to this, but I have to ask, you're not consenting in any circumstance to the filing of this proposed amended complaint?

MR. GREENFIELD: That's correct.

THE COURT: Thank you.

Mr. Shindi, are you in the same boat, sir, as it were?

MR. SHINDI: Yes, your Honor.

THE COURT: Are you making separate arguments or are you co-signing Mr. Greenfield's arguments this afternoon?

MR. SHINDI: No, we are co-signing with Mr. Greenfield's arguments this afternoon.

And just to reiterate again that Mr. Potter is an individual in this case, and so want to be mindful of any additional burden he might face.

THE COURT: Of course. Thank you.

MR. SHINDI: Thank you.

THE COURT: Mr. Greenfield, there's going to be have to be motion practice of some sort. I don't want to cut you off, but there are other things you want to speak about on the issue of futility or the propriety of the amendment or the interplay of Rule 15 and Rule 16, because I think I am familiar

with those concepts.

When you are done telling me that, I would like you to please engage in Mr. Dunlap's proposal of having the motion for leave to amend proceed in parallel with the motion for class certification. My gut reaction is scepticism, but I think that's just as the judge who would have to decide both of them. If you believe as well, sir, that the two motions can proceed in parallel, I'll hear from you.

MR. GREENFIELD: I think I share your scepticism. I think in terms of the class period, they can always — they're not bound by whatever class periods are in their complaint, they can move to certify a class for whatever period they choose. Similarly, if they want to drop parties or claims, they can do that without an amended complaint.

Whether or not they can proceed in parallel, I think the issue that jumps out at me is that they have, at least in our view, very different theory of liability. And if they're going to argue that injury and damages are class issues and not individual issues, their damages model or their explanation of injury.

THE COURT: May I ask you to repeat that sentence? I was taking notes and you were just a bit ahead of me, sir.

MR. GREENFIELD: No problem. The one issue that jumped out at me in proceeding in parallel is that if plaintiffs are going to argue that injury and damages are

class-wide issues, then their theory of injury and damages has to match up with their theory in the complaint. We think that it's a pretty different theory in their proposed second amended complaint from their existing complaint. So I think they need to choose which theory they're following if they're going to make that argument. If they're going to concede that injury and damages are individual issues, which I doubt they will, then maybe that's not a problem.

I guess one other thought on that is it's not totally clear to me from their complaint, I'll admit, but there's some suggestion in their complaint that parties were injured if they purchased during certain periods when they say USDT was debased because there was an outstanding receivable. It's not clear they're saying a person was injured if they bought Bitcoin during a period when there was no outstanding receivables. So the class definition might also depend on first amended complaint versus proposed second amended complaint.

THE COURT: What else should I ask, sir?

MR. GREENFIELD: Nothing you don't already know. I will sit.

THE COURT: Actually, before you sit down, let me please look at my notes. Right now, the class certification motion is due on November 20th. Remind me, please, sir, what's the schedule for expert discovery in this case or does that follow the certification motion?

MR. GREENFIELD: That follows the decision on the certification motion.

THE COURT: So that isn't happening now any way you look at it.

MR. GREENFIELD: There's experts only in class cert.

THE COURT: Yes, so what's available to me scheduling one motion, scheduling two motions basically. No chance of settlement; right?

MR. GREENFIELD: I don't think so.

THE COURT: Thank you.

Mr. Dunlap I'll hear new reply, please.

MR. DUNLAP: Yes, your Honor, you asked him to hum a few bars of his theory. I don't know how much accountability you want. We think it is within what we said before, there is theory put forward in the proposed amended complaint they did create USDT without having sufficient U.S. dollars and we have cited or we can show you, actually, things from discovery where they concede that they didn't actually have in their bank accounts the U.S. dollars necessary to back the USDT that was in circulation throughout the class period.

And when they say that the conspiracy that was originally pled involved the exchange defendants and the crypto capital defendants, there are reasons we're not pursuing those now. Bittrex is in bankruptcy. There is a severe collection risk. We're not going to get anything from them. Poloniex,

the current Poloniex defendants sold its position to another entity and we've had a very limited opportunity to get documents from them again, and they've agreed to some limited cooperation with us, so we thought it best to let them go.

Crypto Capital's assets are still being seized.

Defendant Fowler has been sentenced to something like 75 months in prison. Again we think the collectability issues with those defendants is severe, which is why we're letting them go.

As to the idea that somehow conspiracy or collusion with the anonymous trader is new, I would refer the Court to the filings the parties made back in 2020. You may recall the exchange defendants came forward and said wait a minute, these accounts are actually owned by the anonymous trader, not by Bitfinex. They said can we move for summary judgment on that basis.

We put in a letter, this is docket 137, we said then if an individual, not Bitfinex is the registered owner of the 1J1D and 1886 account, the complaint lays out numerous facts more than reasonable to infer the owner was part of defendant's scheme. We went on. Plaintiffs could disprove the assertion that the account's owner was not part of the defendant's scheme through evidence linking the individual to the defendants. Plaintiffs could obtain such evidence through discovery such as: One, the individual's communications with the relevant defendants; two, defendant's trading records for Bittrex and

Poloniex; three, the individuals and the relevant defendants internal documents regarding that trading activity; four, expert analysis of that trading activity; and five, depositions of the individual and defendants regarding the individual's role in the scheme.

They were on notice three years ago that we were pursuing, in discovery, connections between the anonymous trader and the defendants .that's what we did. We got all of their communications or at least as many as they would produce with the anonymous trader, we got his trading records, we got their internal communications about him. We submitted him to deposition, they got to depose him, where they did not use all their time. For them to come forward now and say this is a complete surprise and some new theory they haven't heard of, we just don't think is backed up by the facts here.

THE COURT: I believe one of the other things

Mr. Greenfield said was the information that's now being

presented in the proposed amended complaint — and I say this

without opining on it because I don't know — was information

that was in your possession years ago.

MR. DUNLAP: Some of the information was, but a lot of the information was not. Your Honor may recall that you compelled them to produce certain financial records over a year ago and it turns out they didn't produce all those records.

And I think you had to issue a total of three orders, the last

one I believe at the end of May of this year requiring them to produce documents. They didn't finish making that production until the end of June. We then had to have our experts look at that information. We started requesting depositions, we asked for them starting in August, but with one exception where we had a conflict. They did not make their employees and their witnesses available to us for deposition until the middle of September. And in fact, your Honor may recall, the first of those deponents they tried to push off for a month at the last minute and we had to come to your Honor to compel that to go forward. So we were not actually able to take depositions from these individuals until September and October.

And I just want to be careful here because of the number of things they told us there the defendants have marked as confidential or attorneys' eyes only, but there are a number of facts that we learned in discovery from the defendants in those depositions that we did not know and we could not have known before we took those depositions. Is I'm glad to go into those now, but I want to make sure I'm respecting the confidentiality part of the order.

THE COURT: At base, you are disagreeing with the suggestion of Mr. Greenfield to the argument of Mr. Greenfield that you had the information you needed to make these amendments at an earlier time?

MR. DUNLAP: Correct, we did not have all of the

information. Some of the information, yes, but we did not have all of the dots to be connected, and that's what we tried to do in discovery.

THE COURT: All right.

MR. DUNLAP: So we will follow whatever you want to do here, clearly. If you think it's more effective for us to do briefing on the motion for leave and push off class certification, we are glad to do that.

THE COURT: Glad is a relative term, sir.

MR. DUNLAP: Yes, glad is a relative term. We prefer to move the case forward, we prefer to do it in parallel, we hear the concerns you're raising, we hear the concerns the other side is raising. We will go along with whatever you would like. And if you're going to grant the other side extra pages, we might have a request of our own for the reply, but let's take a look and see what they have to say, especially if they're going to be briefing -- we, in our opening motion, we tried to brief both why we met Rule 15 and why it would not be futile, why it would be pass Rule 12(b).

THE COURT: My recollection of your briefing was that the focus was on the absence of prejudice that could be demonstrated; am I not correct? I believe what you were talking about was that your adversaries would not be able to demonstrate prejudice. And I think that there's more. I'm not sure that your brief, and forgive me if I'm not remembering

something in it, I'm not sure it really engaged on the issue of the good cause point.

MR. DUNLAP: Well, our brief tried to do a couple of things. The first section of the brief tried to engage on why there was good cause and why there was lack of prejudice, and we talked about our diligence, we talked about the fact that we're not seeking any new discovery, we talked about a number of things going to those factors, and then the back half of the brief, the bulk of the brief was why we stayed claims under Rule 12(b)., and so why the amendment would not be futile.

THE COURT: Just one moment, please. Thank you.

Perhaps I can be more explicit in what I mean when I'm talking about the rule. What I understand the inquires for me to conduct are the one under Rule 15 and the one under Rule 16.

When I typically think about good cause, what I'm usually seeing is someone saying to me that information was withheld from them or it wasn't until a particular deposition, and your good cause argument is three pages — two and a half pages long. It does seem to focus on the showing of undue prejudice, it doesn't seem to focus on the good cause. But, again, that's my recollection of the document, which I'm trying to refresh as I talk to you. But maybe that is this is the argument you wish to make.

MR. DUNLAP: No, I understand the point you're making.

We did focus on the lack of prejudice. We will be glad -- if they're really going to allege that we had all the information necessary to make the allegations we did before completing depositions, we will be glad to respond to that and lay out how that is absolutely not the case. But we did say that there was relevant information that was disclosed in discovery and we went through a number of those documents in the background section. Again, I don't want to --

THE COURT: We're not arguing with each other.

MR. DUNLAP: Exactly.

THE COURT: I'm just saying there's going to be an opposition that says you knew all of this some time ago and could have done this long ago, and I don't know that you've answered that here, and perhaps that is what the reply is for.

MR. DUNLAP: Yes.

THE COURT: Unfortunately, sir, I don't think you've persuaded me that these can run in parallel. So perhaps what I can ask is for you and Mr. Greenfield and your teams to speak to each other, to discuss a schedule, including page extensions, that would be realistic and that I might actually sign off on.

So can I ask you to do that by the end of the week or is that asking too much?

MR. DUNLAP: I believe it's okay for us.

MR. GREENFIELD: Yeah, that's fine.

THE COURT: Then we will have to adjourn the motion for class certification, again, with much regret because I don't see a way around it. Does anyone want to bring anything else to my attention? MR. DUNLAP: Not from the plaintiffs. MR. GREENFIELD: No. THE COURT: I'll look for your schedule. I thank you all very much. I'll let you go. Thank you. We're adjourned. * * *